

Am. N. Amer. Asiatic immigr. 1932

The Japanese Bogey

What Is It Made of



NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON AMERICAN JAPANESE RELATIONS
287 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y.

The National Committee on American Japanese Relations
is composed entirely of American citizens, and carries on
its educational program with funds contributed exclusively
by American citizens.

The Japanese Bogey

American Prejudice Against Japan

One of the most ominous things in current American life, as I see it on returning to the mainland after seven years' residence in Hawaii, is the steady and largely unconscious building up of an international prejudice against Japan.

The average intelligent and even Christian business man of Chicago, for instance, although he may never have known a Japanese personally, has a vague but uncomfortable feeling that the Japanese are dishonest, tricky, unreliable, capable of any conceivable treachery against America and utterly unassimilable into American life and citizenship. Just why he feels that way he doesn't know, but that is the way he feels. By means not observed or understood an anti-Japanese complex has been built up within him. And the process is still going on.

Now it is profoundly important to understand this prejudice building process and stop it, if possible, for a new world neighborhood is growing up around the Pacific which, thus far, is happily free from the age-long animosities and inherited prejudices which have so paralyzed the power of international cooperation and goodwill in Europe. In this new Pacific area of international contacts it might be possible to start on a basis of mutual goodwill and hopeful understanding. But not if the drift of prejudice in America continues to set against Japan and the Japanese as at present.

Japanese Responsibility

Part of the responsibility for this growing Japanophobia lies at the door of the Japanese government itself. Our traditionally friendly public opinion about Japan in America was rudely shocked and scandalized by the actions of her military party during the war. The twenty-one demands on China, the disposition to gobble up Shantung, the uncertainty about returning Tsing-tao to Chinese sovereignty, the over-bearing and aggressive attitude of her army in Siberia, the military tyranny over Korea, came one after another as blows to an American public opinion traditionally friendly to Japan.

Recent Changes in Japan

Of course, those who go to Japan today or who study Japanese public life know that there has been a great change in Japanese governmental policy and program, that the military party has lost its ascendancy and that the new civilian forces in Japanese life are reversing the policies of the military party and seeking to retrieve its blunders. The Washington Conference on Limita-

tion of Armament marked the turning of the tide and the passing of the militaristic program. Shantung has been given back, Siberia evacuated, a new conciliatory spirit is now being shown in Korea—as I have seen with my own eyes—and the twenty-one demands on China are frankly criticised and disavowed by the type of men now coming into leadership.

American Lack of Knowledge

But the average American knows nothing of all this. The inner movement of Japanese political opinion might as well take place in Mars. All he knows is that the Japanese behavior during the war was highly irritating. Nor does the average American stop to think of the kind of experience in international politics which lay back of this bad behavior—how Japan had seen European nations unscrupulously serambling for China and cynically disregarding all considerations except military power.

As someone has said: "For decades Japan watched the European nations at their poker games. Finally, when she got up her courage to go in and play poker too, the others all said, 'Let's play parchesi!'" If Japan can only be assured that the world means to play parchesi and not poker from now on she will be the greatest little parchesi player in the crowd, for it is characteristic of the Japanese that they take peculiar pride in coming up to what is expected of them. Witness the present enthusiastic support in Japan of the League of Nations.

Fear on Pacific Coast

But the growth of anti-Japanese prejudice in America is also due to the fear of the Pacific to be inundated with Oriental immigration. A wise man once said: "The man to be most afraid of is the man who is himself afraid." Fear paralyzes good judgment and fair play and tends to hysteria and fanaticism.

A Pacific coast which feels it is fighting for its racial integrity and economic independence is not likely to be scrupulous as to its choice of weapons. Anything which bids fair to secure the backing of the rest of the country in keeping out the Oriental will be used without too nice discrimination as to its truth, generosity or possible reactions.

Hatred born of fear was just as violent toward the Chinese in the '80's, although it is now forgotten because the Chinese exclusion act has laid

the ghost of Chinese ascendancy. It is to be expected that, ungracious and discourteous as was the method of its passage, the present immigration law may have a similar effect in quieting Western fears of a Japanese inundation.

It is entirely probable that, assured that California is to remain a white man's country, the innate generosity of the Californian will in a few years reassert itself and we shall have an appreciation of the Japanese parallel to the popularity of the Chinese.

The Political Twist

One must always remember, too, that abusing the Japanese has a peculiar political twist to it on the Pacific coast. Every astute politician welcomes an issue over which he can arouse passion without losing votes, and no issue fits this need quite so well as denunciation of a foreign nation or a non-voting alien population. The Japanese question has, therefore, been a veritable godsend to the practical politician and he has not neglected it.

Pacific Coast Fears Unwarranted

Personally, after thirty years' residence in California and seven in Hawaii, I think the fears of the Pacific coast are unwarranted and have been artificially stimulated. I do not believe in unlimited immigration of any Oriental race. Indeed I feel that, until America has solved her race problem in the South, it would be folly to invite another one on the Pacific coast.

But the protection of the Pacific coast from the evils of a racial caste system does not require

hatred or misrepresentation of the Japanese nor any prejudice against them. The problem is entirely capable of being handled by negotiation between the United States and Japan.

Japan no more desires to force immigration where it is unwelcome than she would tolerate having immigration forced upon her. The golden rule is perfectly logical and intelligible to the Japanese mind.

Racial Inferiority

What many Americans seem to fail to understand is that the Japanese objection to the recent immigration bill is because of its implication of racial inferiority, and not its effectiveness as an exclusion measure. This is coupled with a humiliating sense of the diplomatic discourtesy with which the whole question was handled.

"What better are you than the Germans who tore up their treaty about Belgium as a scrap of paper?" said a distinguished Japanese to me in Tokyo last October. "You tore up your gentlemen's agreement with us without the slightest courtesy or consultation."

Of course it is very difficult to get a Japanese to understand the intricacies of our federal government sufficiently to appreciate that the gentlemen's agreement was not a treaty at all, but only an arrangement with one branch of our government, the executive, and, for that very reason, cal-

culated to arouse the jealousy and suspicion of another branch, the legislative.

Incidentally, the fact that Ambassador Hanihara, with perfectly good intentions, was, by one of the maddening limitations of language, placed in the position of seeming to threaten where he only meant to implore, added still more fuel to the flames of anti-Japanese prejudice and unwittingly provided an incident capable of being misconstrued to the limit by the journalists and politicians of the baser sort.

Propaganda for Army and Navy

is yet another force at work developing anti-Japanese prejudice in the United States that grows out of the propaganda which such a prejudice to those who seek to create a larger army and navy.

the unconscious of the wickedness and possible future misery which their policy involves, the extreme but short-sighted advocates of so-called preparedness find it quite to their purpose to promote fear and suspicion of Japan.

in order to secure great appropriations for military purposes from Congress, and the ac-

quiescence of the American people in such appropriations, it is necessary to point out a foe.

It is obvious that a psychology of anticipation of trouble with Japan, if it can be created, will loosen the national purse-strings and make the achievement of a large army and supremely powerful navy relatively easy.

There are those who believe that this movement has behind it the cold-blooded, calculating backing of interests which profit by the manufacture of ships and armaments. That I am loathe to believe. The thoughtless opportunism of short-sighted militaristic editors and professional soldiers seems quite adequate to explain it.

Honest but Thoughtless Opportunism

They honestly believe that, with a big enough military establishment, all will be well with America, and they are too blind to look ahead and ask where this sort of thing will end. They have learned nothing from the armament races in Europe which paved the way for the great war. They have no regard for psychology and have never paused to realize that in human nature man ultimately does that which he persistently rehearses in his mind. Think and talk and get ready for "der tag" and "der tag" will surely come.

You may have noticed the illustration of this tendency contained in the reports of the recent naval maneuvers in Hawaii as printed in a prominent Chicago paper. Not only was it directly stated that the size of the "black" fleet which "captured" Oahu was equivalent to the Japanese naval strength but, in nearly every dispatch, the accounts of the maneuvers themselves were cleverly intertwined with references to the Japanese in Hawaii who, by insinuation and innuendo or open charge, were presented in as unfavorable a light as possible.

I know Hawaii and the conditions there and so could judge how misleading and prejudicial the statements were, but the unwary reader only got what he was intended to get—a cleverly combined impression of Japanese treachery and the need of naval appropriations.

Where did the newspaper correspondent get his viewpoint and alleged facts about the Japanese? Did his intimate association with naval officers supply it? Does it unconsciously reveal the typical state of mind of our naval officers?

A Quotation from President Coolidge

May there not be some connection between all this and the sane and wholesome admonition by President Coolidge to the naval cadets at Annapolis last June?

"As one who is responsible not only for our national defense, but our friendly relations with other peoples and our title to the good opinion of the world, I feel that occasion will very seldom arise, and I know it does not now exist, when those connected with our navy are justified, either directly or by inference, in asserting that other specified powers are arming against us, and, by arousing national suspicion and hatred, attempting to cause us to arm against them."

These are words which may well be pondered by every editor, and every active and reserve officer, as well as every other loyal and patriotic citizen who wishes to promote his country's reputation for being a peacemaker and not a peace-disturber in the company of nations.

Three Causal Factors

But, be that as it may, the fact remains that these three causes operating in unconscious cooperation—the mistakes of Japan herself, the fears of the Pacific coast and the need of militarism for a potential foe—have developed and are still promoting a most unfortunate attitude of suspicion and prejudice against Japan and the Japanese throughout the United States.